

JEAN-BAPTISTE OUDRY'S
illustrations for
JEAN DE LA FONTAINE'S *FABLES*



CHRISTIE'S

F A B L E II.

LE CORBEAU

ET

LE RENARD





J.B. Oudry 1752

JEAN-BAPTISTE OUDRY'S
illustrations for
JEAN DE LA FONTAINE'S *FABLES*

FEATURED IN

REMASTERED
OLD MASTERS *from the* COLLECTION *of* J.E. SAFRA

SELLING **WITHOUT RESERVE**

Each of the lots in this sale are offered without reserve. While all of the paintings offered in *Remastered: Old Masters from the Collection of J.E. Safra* are listed in the printed and online catalogues with pre-sale estimates, during the auction each lot will be sold to the highest bidder, regardless of the published estimate.

AUCTION

Wednesday 25 January 2023
10.00am (Lots 1-76)

20 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

VIEWING

Friday 20 January by appointment only
Saturday 21 January 10.00am - 5.00pm
Sunday 22 January 10.00am - 5.00pm
Monday 23 January 10.00am - 5.00pm
Tuesday 24 January 1.00pm - 5.00pm

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AUCTION CODE AND NUMBER

In sending absentee bids or making enquiries, this sale should be referred to as
KYRA-22297

ABSENTEE AND TELEPHONE BIDS

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CHRISTIE'S

JEAN-BAPTISTE OUDRY

(PARIS 1686-1755 BEAUVAIS)

Album containing a frontispiece and 138 illustrations for books I to VI of the Fables of Jean de La Fontaine

each drawing (except nos. 16, 23, 65 and 103) signed 'JB. Oudry' and dated '1729', '1730', or '1731', the frontispiece dated '1752'; with a handwritten title page 'FABLES/ DE/ LA FONTAINE/ DESSINEES/ PAR J.B. OUDRY/ PEINTRE ORD.RE DU ROY/ ET/ DE SON ACADEMIE DE PEINTURE ET SCULPTURE// OUVRAGE/ Commencé en 1729/ Et fini en 1734./ CONTENANT 245 FABLES.'; each drawing pasted onto the pages of the album, and above numbered from 1 to 139, but skipping 48; opposite each drawing the fable's number (in Roman numerals) and title; on the last three pages an alphabetical index of the fables' titles; pasted into the beginning of the book a handwritten note by De Bure frères dated 1828 describing the contents of the album and of the second volume

brush and black (in a few cases brown) ink, gray wash, heightened with white, on blue paper, pen and black ink framing lines, blue wash; bound in contemporary blue leather gilt with lettering on the spine 'DESSEINS DES/ FABLES DE LA FONTAINE PAR/ I.B. OUDRY' and 'PREMIERE PARTIE'

each drawing *circa* 9 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (24 x 19 cm.), each page *circa* 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 10 in. (30.8 x 25.5 cm.)

\$1,500,000–2,500,000

SELLING WITHOUT RESERVE

PROVENANCE:

Jean-Louis Regnard de Montenault, Paris, *circa* 1751.

with De Bure frères, Paris;

Jean-Jacques de Bure (1765–1853), Paris, 1828; Paris, 1–18 December 1853, part of lot 344 (both volumes), sold for 1,800 francs to

Comte Antoine-Claire Thibaudeau (1765–1854), Paris; both volumes possibly given by him to

Eugénie Doche (1821–1900), Paris; both volumes sold by her for 2,500 francs to

Librairie Fontaine, Paris; both volumes sold for 5,000 francs in 1856 to

Aaron Euryale dit Félix Solar (1815–1871), Paris; Paris, 19 November–18 December 1860, part of lot 627 (both volumes), sold for 6,100 francs in 1860 to Cléder for

Baron Isidore-Justin-Séverin Taylor (1789–1879), Paris.

Emile Péreire (1800–1875), Paris (both volumes).

with Librairie Morgand et Fatout, Paris, bought *circa* 1876 (*Bulletin de la librairie Morgand et Fatout*, I, no. 6, January 1877, p. 482); both volumes sold to

Louis Roederer (1845–1880), Reims; by inheritance to his nephew,

Louis-Victor Olry-Roederer (1860–1903), Reims.

Agnew's, London; both volumes sold in 1923, with the rest of Olry-Roederer's library, to

Albert Simon Wolf Rosenbach (1875–1903), New York;

Rosenbach Company, Philadelphia; both volumes sold *circa* 1946 to

Raphaël Esmérian (1903–1976), Paris (his ex-libris); Palais Galliera, Paris, 6 June 1973, part of lot 46 (both volumes), sold for 2,000,000 francs to

Claus Virch (1927–2012), Bermuda Islands (Art Associates Partnership), who dismembers the second album.

British Rail Pension Fund, London (the first volume); Sotheby's, London, 3 July 1986, lot 96.

EXHIBITED:

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, *Fables from Aesop to Thurber*, 1965 (without catalogue).

LITERATURE:

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H. Cohen, *Guide de l'amateur de livres à gravures du XVIIIe siècle*, fifth edition, Paris, 1886, cols. 301–302.

A. Després, *Les Éditions illustrées des Fables de La Fontaine*, Paris, 1892, p. 29.

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J. Locquin, *Archives de l'art français*, new series, VI, 1912, *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre de Jean-Baptiste Oudry, peintre du Roi (1686-1755)*, p. 152, nos. 933–1072.

Marquis de Girardin, 'L'Édition des Fables dite d'Oudry de La Fontaine', *Bulletin du bibliophile et du bibliothécaire*, 1913, pp. 219, 220.

S. de Ricci, *The Roederer Library of French Books, Prints and Drawings of the Eighteenth Century*, Philadelphia and New York, 1923, [p. 7].

R. Gaucheron, 'La Préparation et le lancement d'un livre de luxe au XVIIIème siècle. L'Édition des Fables de La Fontaine dite d'Oudry', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 2, 1927, pp. 77, 80.

E. Rodocanachi, 'Les Petites-filles de La Fontaine et la propriété littéraire', *Séances et travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques. Compte rendu*, XC, 1930, pp. 95, 98.

J. Vergnet-Ruiz, 'Oudry, 1686 à 1755', in L. Dimier, ed., *Les Peintres français du XVIIIe siècle*, II, Paris, 1930, pp. 146, 147, 182, part of nos. 169–445.

H. Voss, in H. Thieme, U. Becker *et al.*, eds., *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zum Gegenwart*, XXVI, Leipzig, 1932, p. 98.

R. Genaille, 'Les Fables de La Fontaines en tapisseries de Beauvais du XVIIIème siècle. Contribution à l'étude de J.B. Oudry', *Mémoires de la Société académique d'archéologie, sciences et arts du département de l'Oise*, XXVII, 1933, p. 439.



FABLES
DE
LA FONTAINE

DESSINÉES

PAR J. B. OUDRY

PEINTRE ORD.^{re} DU ROY

ET

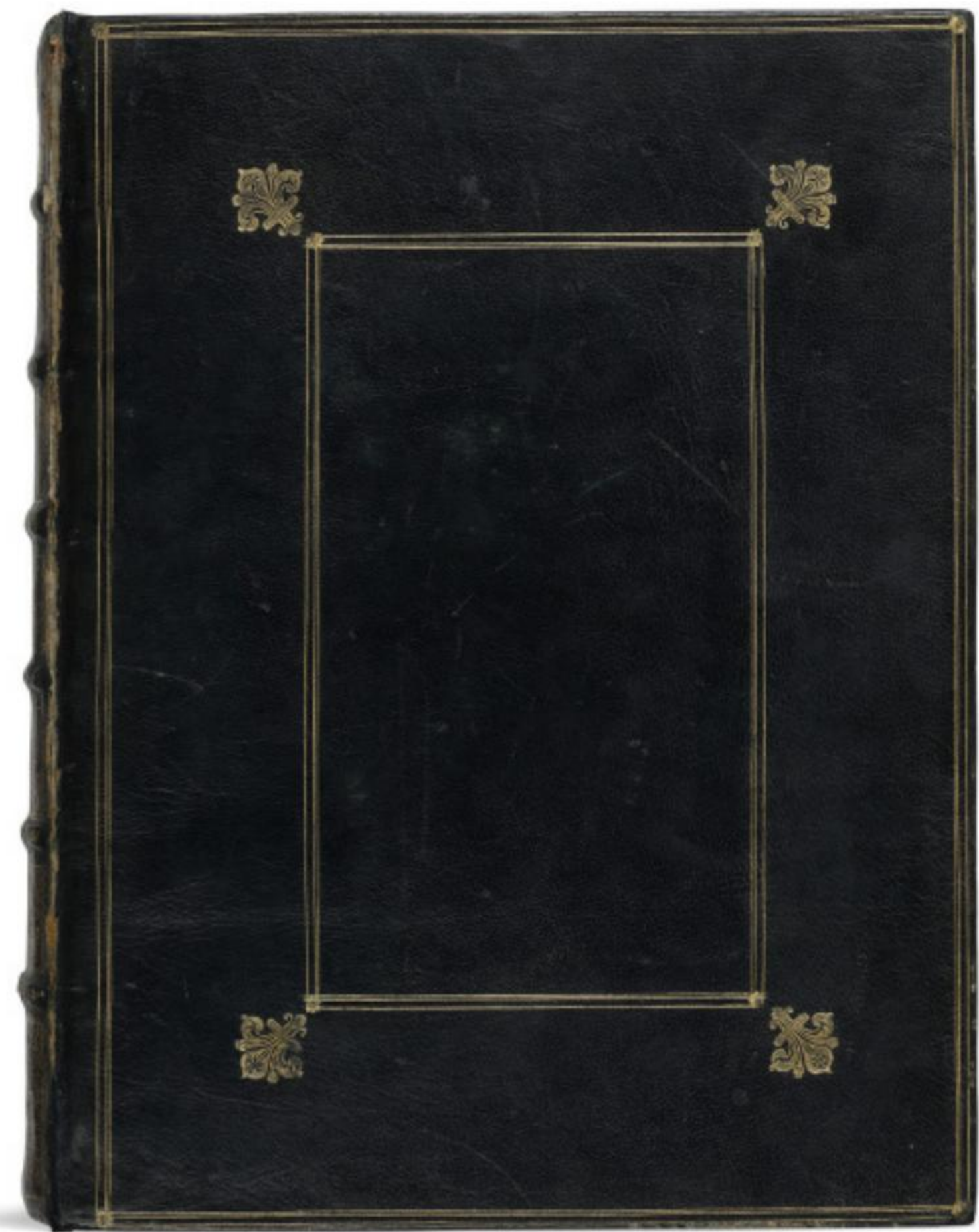
DE SON ACADEMIE DE PEINTURE ET SCULPTURE

OUVRAGE

Commencé en 1729

Et fini en 1734.

CONTENANT 245 FABLES.



Figs. 1 and 2. The album's eighteenth-century binding.

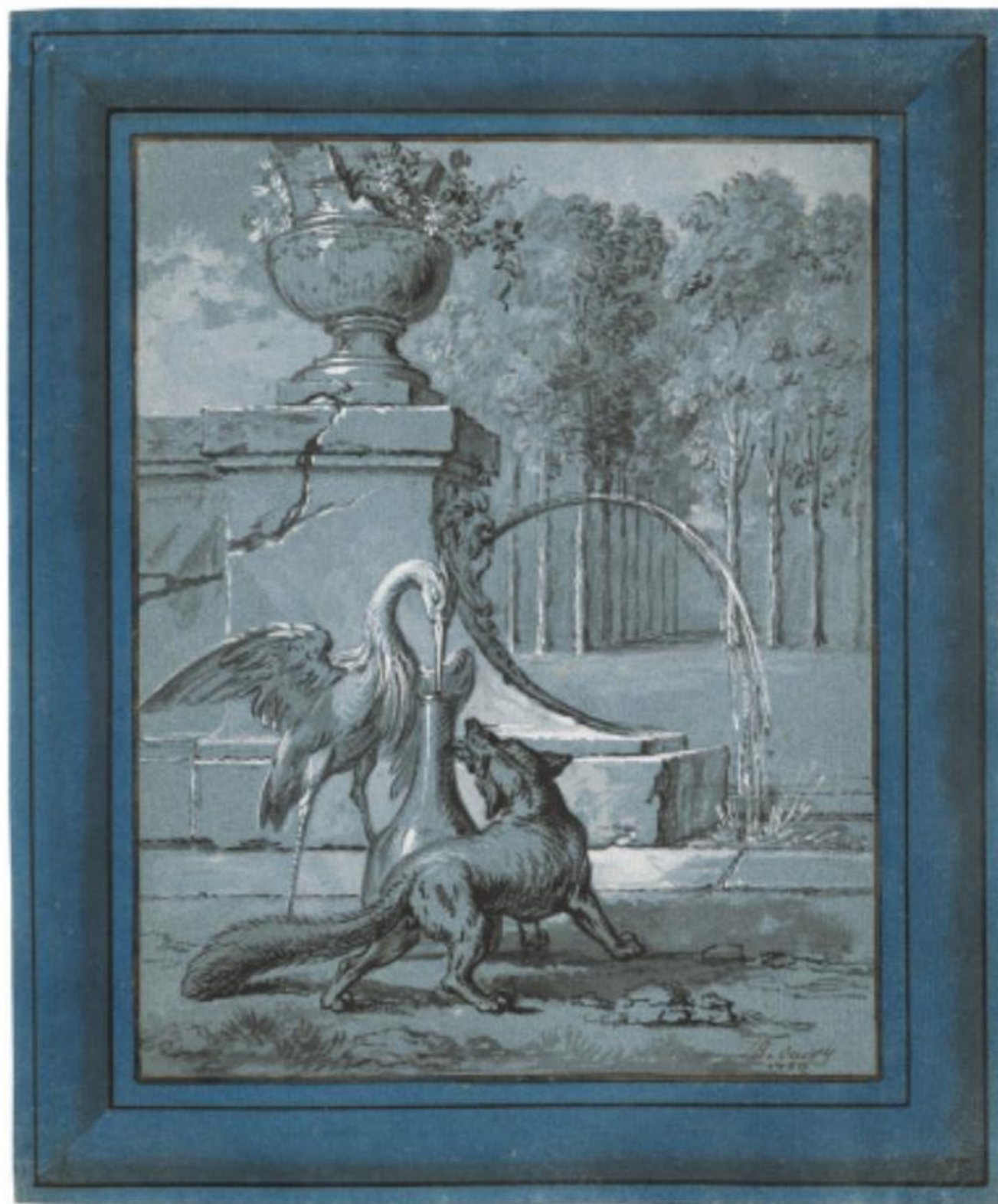
M. Roux, *Inventaire du fonds français. Graveurs du dix-huitième siècle*, I, Paris, 1930, pp. 57, 332–333; III, Paris, 1934, p. 503; IV, Paris, 1946, pp. 74–76.
P. Mornand, 'Iconographie des Fables de la Fontaine', *Le Portique*, no. 3, 1946, p. 85.
J. Furstenberg, *La Gravure originale dans l'illustrations du livre français aux dix-huitième siècle/ Die Original-Graphik in der französischen Buch-Illustration des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg, 1975, pp. 17, 18, 79.
H.N. Opperman, *Jean-Baptiste Oudry*, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1972 (published New York and London, 1977), I, p. 99–101, 128, 143; II, pp. 682–685, nos. D221–D359.
H.N. Opperman, *J.-B. Oudry, 1686–1755*, exhib. cat., Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1982–1983, pp. 24, 37, 39, 157–159.
J.-B. Oudry, 1686–1755, exhib. cat., Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum, and Kansas City, The Nelson–Atkins Museum of Art, 1983, pp. 146–147, under no. 39 (catalogue by H.N. Opperman).
Die französischen Zeichnungen, 1570–1930, exhib. cat., Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, 1983, p. 39, under no. 13 (entry by J. Eckart von Borries).
U. Bodemann in *Fabula docet. Illustrierte Fabelbücher aus sechs Jahrhunderten*, exhib. cat., Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, and other venues, 1983–1985, p. 130, under no. 51.
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C.D. Denison, *French Master Drawings from The Pierpont Morgan Library*, exhib. cat., Paris, Musée du Louvre, and New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1993–1994, p. 96, under no. 41.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Jean de la Fontaine*, 1995–1996, p. 154 (essay by C. Lesage).
H.N. Opperman, in J. Turner, ed., *The Dictionary of Art*, London, 1996, XXIII, p. 667.

S.F. McCulagh, 'Illustrations for La Fontaine's Fable 80, "Nothing in Excess" ("Rien de trop"), 1732', *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, XXVI, 2000, no. 1, *Maineri to Miró: The Regenstein Collection since 1975*, pp. 42.
Staatliches Museum Schwerin, exhib. cat., Schwerin, Staatliches Museum Schwerin, 2000, pp. 10–11 (essay by C. Schönfeld).
European Drawings from the Collection of the Ackland Art Museum, exhibition. cat., Chapel Hill, Ackland Art Museum, 2001 p. 116, under no. 44 (entry by A.L. Schroder).
P. Fontimpe, *Jean de La Fontaine de A à Z. Dictionnaire historique, artistique et littéraire*, Reims, 2001, p. 192.
R.J.A. te Rijdt, *De Watteau à Ingres. Dessins français du XVIIIe siècle du Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*, exhib. cat., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, and Paris, Institut Néerlandais, 2002–2003, p. 67, under nos. 20–21, ill.
S. Couturier, *French drawings from the National Gallery of Canada*, exhib. cat., Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, Victoria, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, and Edmonton, Edmonton Art Gallery, 2004–2005, p. 98, under no. 38.
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X. Ressos, in A. Beyer, B. Savoy and W. Tegethoff, eds., *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon. Die bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, XCIV, Berlin and Boston, 2017, p. 41.
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Fig. 3. Gabriel Huquier, after Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *The Fox and the Stork*. Etching. British Museum, London.



No. 21.



No. 87.

It is hard to think of a more fortunate encounter between a painter and a literary work than that between the greatest of French *animaliers*, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, and the fables of Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695). Among the most widely admired poems in French literature, they still delight every child who gets to learn them at school, and rare are those with a French education who cannot recite, long after having left school, at least some verses of *La Cigale et la fourmi* ('The Cicada and the Ant') or *Le Corbeau et le renard* ('The Crow and the Fox'). Throughout his career, Oudry produced paintings which took inspiration from one or another of the fables, such as *The Fox and the Grapes* from 1725, formerly in the Staatliches Museum Schwerin, the *Lion and the Fly* from 1732 at the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (inv. NM 862), a pair of paintings made in 1747 for the decoration of the Dauphin's appartement in Versailles from 1747 (inv. MV 6212, MV 6213), and numerous other canvases (Opperman, *op. cit.*, 1977, I, nos. P51-PP85, II, figs. 121, 177, 178, 200, 223, 424; and Opperman, *op. cit.*, 1982-1983, nos. 86, ill.). It was, however, in an extended series of 275 drawings that he measured himself fully with La Fontaine's fables, proving himself in the process to be as gifted a storyteller, a poet and a wit as was his literary predecessor. The album offered here (Figs. 1 and 2), which includes the first half of Oudry's illustrations for the fables and which is the only one to be preserved intact, is at the same time a monument to the artist's mastery and playfulness, and homage to an undisputed masterpiece of French poetry.

As recounted by Oudry's first biographer, the Abbé Louis Gougenot, in a manuscript from 1761, written shortly after the artist's death (but published only in 1854), the drawings were 'only the fruit of the evenings of two winters' (*op. cit.*, p. 380: 'cet ouvrage [...] n'est le fruit que des soirées de deux hivers'). In fact, as the dates on the drawings indicate, they were made over a period of five years, between 1729 and 1734, but it is indeed possible that Oudry worked on them at night, while during the day he created his paintings, as well as the designs for tapestries which preoccupied him for much of the 1730s (Opperman, *op. cit.*, 1982-1983, pp. 126-156). The dates also show that he worked through the 243 fables, divided into five books,

in the order intended by La Fontaine. The idiosyncratic technique of the drawings – brush and gray or sometimes brown ink, skilfully heightened with white bodycolor on blue paper – lends the scenes an almost nocturnal feeling, even if most are actually set during the day. A *trompe-l'œil* frame, consisting of black pen lines and blue wash on the drawings' primary support, heightens this impression, and makes the drawings unique and immediately recognizable among Oudry's substantial output as a draftsman, and among French drawings of the period in general.

It seems Oudry did not intend his drawings for any other purpose than his own enjoyment; the preface of the edition discussed below specifies that he 'made them for his own pleasure, and in those moments of joy and fancy when an artist vividly captures the ideas inspired by his subject, and when he gives free rein to his genius' (*Fables choisies, mises en vers*, I, Paris, 1755, p. iv: 'les composoit pour son propre plaisir, & dans ces momens de joie & de fantaisie où un Artiste saisit vivement les idées de son sujet, & donne un libre essor à son génie'). But the idea to make them into prints to illustrate La Fontaine's text must have been an obvious one. Probably around 1750, some twenty years after Oudry started working on his drawings, the printmaker Gabriel Huquier brought out a first set of twelve prints under the title *Livre d'animaux* (Fig. 3; see Opperman, *op. cit.*, 1982-1983, p. 158). Shortly afterwards, the Paris publisher Jean-Louis Regnard de Montenault acquired the series, completed in 1752 with a frontispiece which opens the first volume. However, the painterly quality of Oudry's style made the drawings less suited to serve as direct models for the engravers, and Montenault commissioned Charles-Nicolas Cochin the Younger (1715-1790) to copy the compositions in a more linear style in graphite (for two examples in the collection of Jean Bonna, see N. Strasser, *Dessins français du XVIIe au XVIIIe siècle*, Geneva, 2016, no. 64, ill.; and for one at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (inv. 41139), see Couturier, *op. cit.*, no. 39, ill.). Cochin, in association with more than forty other printmakers, produced the elegant engravings to which the edition brought out by Montenault still owes its reputation as one of the most magnificently illustrated books of the eighteenth century (Fig. 4). The first three volumes appeared



Fig. 4. Jean de La Fontaine, *Fables choisies, mises en vers*, 4 vols., Paris, 1755-1759 (or 1760). Copy sold at *The Exceptional Sale 2022*, Christie's, Paris, 22 November 2022, lot 28.

speedily in 1755 and 1756, but the costs of the undertaking were so high that the fourth and final volume, of which the title page is dated 1759, was published probably only in 1760, thanks to a substantial grant from King Louis XV himself (Opperman, *op. cit.*, 1977, II, p. 684).

The engravings generally reproduce the drawings' compositions faithfully, although in some of them changes were introduced: a small number do not reverse the original composition, meaning Cochin must have reversed them in his drawing after them (nos. 5, 9, 19, 37, 63); and sometimes details were altered, as in drawing 88, or in the frontispiece (no. 1), where the bust admired by the hunchbacked Aesop and a grouping of animals appears in the drawing to represent Louis XV, whereas in the engraving he is recognizable as La Fontaine. What the prints fail to capture, however, is the spirited execution of Oudry's originals: the agility of the brushwork, the effective use of darker accents, and the subtlety and playfulness of the white heightening.

It is ironic that the compositions, which played an important role in establishing Oudry's reputation (Opperman, *op. cit.*, 1977, II, pp. 157-158), were better known to his modern admirers from the prints than from the original drawings before the sale of the two albums in 1973, and even afterwards most drawings were not reproduced. The scholar and dealer Claus Virch, who bought both albums, dismembered the second one, containing drawings made between 1732 and 1734, and individual sheets from it found their way to numerous museums in Europe and in particular in North America (see, for instance, Te Rijdt, *op. cit.*, nos. 20-21, ill.; and Grasselli, *op. cit.*, no. 48, ill.), and to private collections such as Jeffrey Horvitz's (Clark, *op. cit.*, 2017, no. 13, ill., p. 621, nos. A.822, A.823, ill.; Clark, *op. cit.*, 2022, no. 52, ill.); and they regularly appear on the market (recent examples sold Sotheby's, New York, 31 January 2018, lot 6; Christie's, New York, 30 October 2018, lot 256; and Sotheby's, London, 29 July 2020, lots 225 and 226). Virch left intact the first album, with the drawings made between 1729 and 1731, sold it on to the British Rail Pension Fund, which in its turn offered the album for sale in 1996.

Few have had an occasion to see it, and it had not been photographed in its entirety before the preparations of the present sale. A reproduction of all drawings in the first album is available on www.christies.com.

Those who take the time to leaf through the album – in person or virtually – are greatly rewarded. Oudry is a faithful illustrator of La Fontaine's text, providing at least one drawing for each fable, in some cases two, and in one case even five. While in some instances, he found models for his compositions in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century illustrations of Aesop's fables (Opperman, *op. cit.*, 1977, II, p. 684), and while other sources can still be discovered, as a whole the series of drawings stands out for its inventiveness and freshness of inspiration. Oudry exploits his talent in depicting 'as actors performing in established roles in the same way history painters were trained to compose their human actors' (C. Giviskos in exhib. cat., Los Angeles, Houston, and Schwerin, *op. cit.*, p. 88). But the poems also feature contemporary men and women, and Oudry stages them, both in interior and exterior scenes, like a skilled director. It is perhaps these exterior scenes, many of them in rural settings, that surprise the viewer most when given the opportunity to take in the riches of the album. They offer a unique panorama of the French countryside in the eighteenth century – sometimes realistic, sometimes less so, but always enchanting. They also enrich our understanding of Oudry's gift as a landscapist in a different way than do the backgrounds in his paintings or tapestry designs, or than his famous drawn views of the park at Arcueil (X. Salmon *et al.*, *À l'ombre des frondaisons d'Arcueil. Dessiner un jardin du XVIIIe siècle*, exhib. cat., Paris, Musée du Louvre, 2016, *passim*). Alongside a smaller number of scenes set in bourgeois houses or more modest farmer's dwellings, they provide a poetic atmosphere for the amusing tales and moralizing messages of La Fontaine, of which the richness can only be fully appreciated when seeing a great number of drawings in succession. Only the album presented here still provides this possibility, securing its place in eighteenth-century French art as a graphic masterpiece inspired by a literary classic from the seventeenth century.

Book I



1. *La Cigale et la fourmi*, 1729



2. Le Corbeau et le renard, 1729



3. La Grenouille qui se veut faire aussi grosse que le bœuf, 1729



4. *Les Deux mulets*, first drawing, 1729



5. *Les Deux mulets*, second drawing, 1729



6. Le Loup et le chien, 1729



7. Le Génisse, la chèvre et la brebis, en société avec le Lion, 1729



8. La Besace, 1729



9. L'Hirondelle et les petits oiseaux, 1729



10. *Le Rat de ville et le rat des champs*, 1729



11. Le Loup et l'agneau, 1729



12. *L'Homme et son image*, 1729



13. *Le Dragon à plusieurs têtes et le dragon à plusieurs queues*, first drawing, 1730



14. *Le Dragon à plusieurs têtes et le dragon à plusieurs queues*, second drawing, 1729



15. Les Voleurs et l'âne, 1729



16. Simonide préservé par les Dieux



17. La Mort et le malheureux, 1729



18. La Mort et le bûcheron, 1729



19. *L'Homme entre deux âges et ses deux maîtresses*, 1729



20. *Le Renard et la cigogne*, first drawing, 1729



21. *Le Renard et la cigogne*, second drawing, 1729







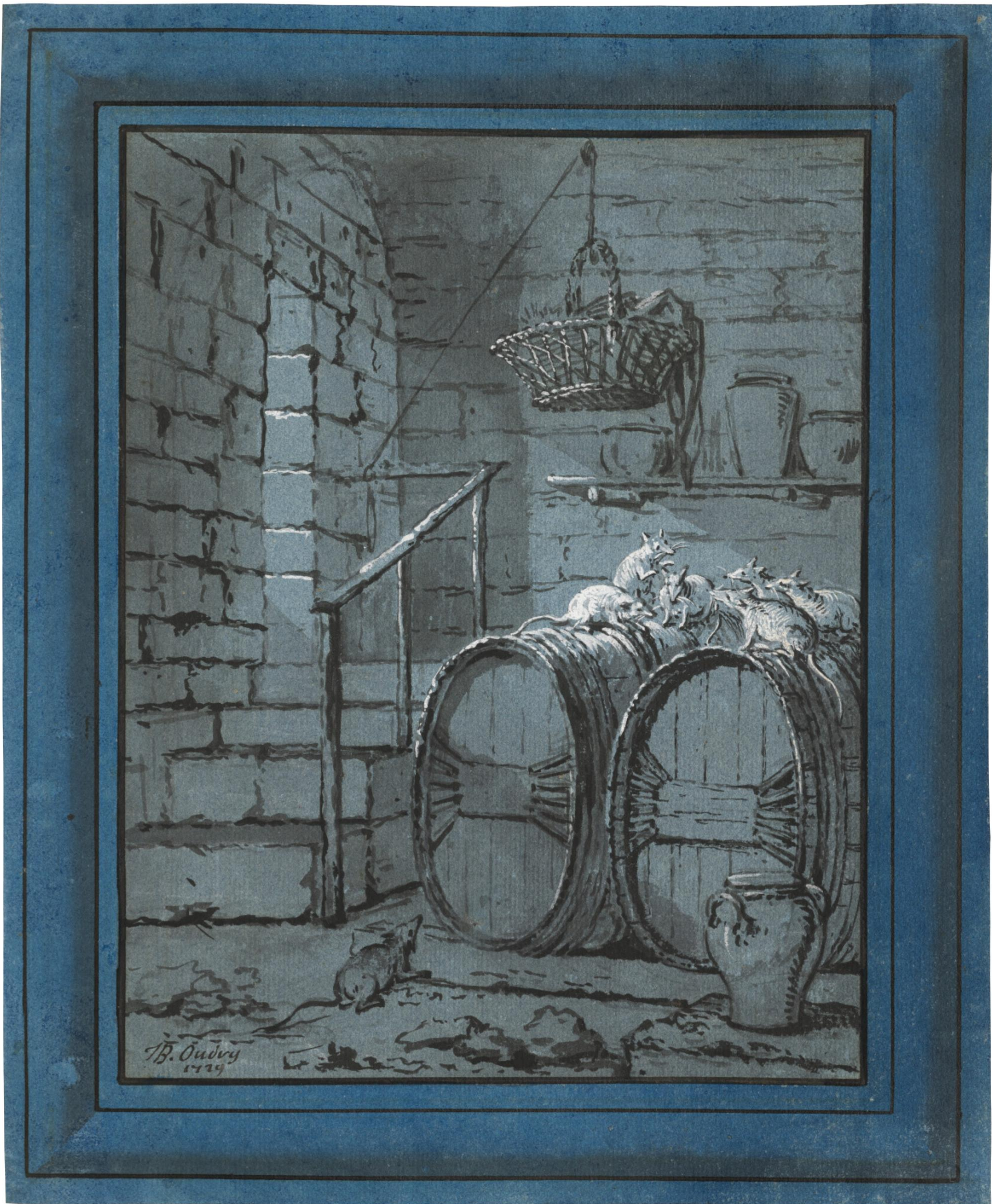
24. Les Frelons et les mouches à miel, 1729



25. Le Chêne et le roseau, 1729

Book II





27. Conseil tenu par les rats, 1729



28. Le Loup plaidant contre le renard par devant le singe, 1729



29. Les Deux taureaux et une grenouille, 1729





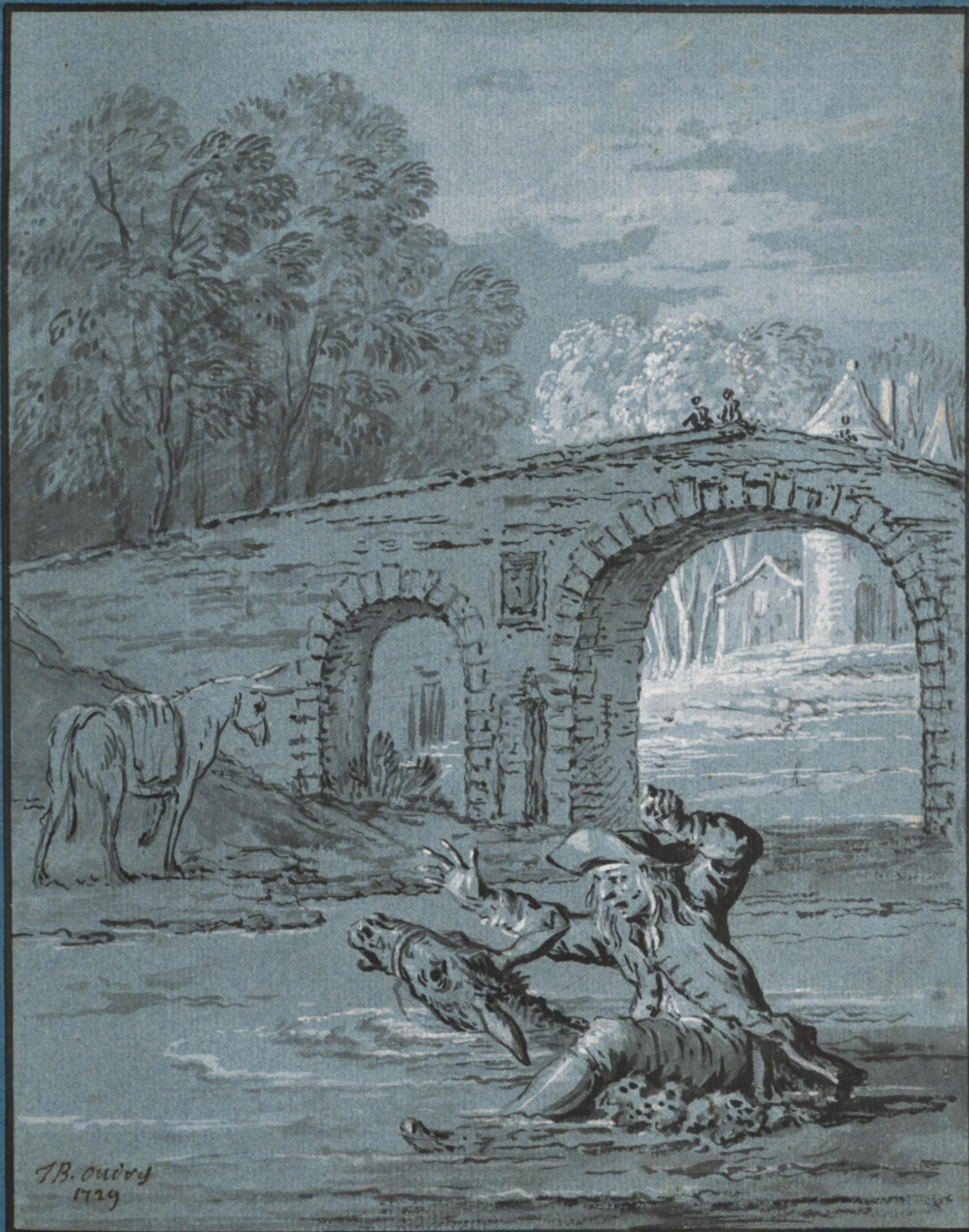
31. *L'Oiseau blessé d'une flèche*, 1729





33. *L'Aigle et l'escarbot*, 1729





J.B. Oudry
1729







38. *L'Astrologue qui se laisse tomber dans un puits*, 1729









42. Le Paon se plaignant à Junon, 1729



J.B. Oudry 1729





Book III





47. *Le Meunier, son fils et l'âne*, second drawing, 1729



49. *Le Meunier, son fils et l'âne*, third drawing, 1729



50. *Le Meunier, son fils et l'âne*, fourth drawing, 1729



51. *Le Meunier, son fils et l'âne*, fifth drawing, 1729

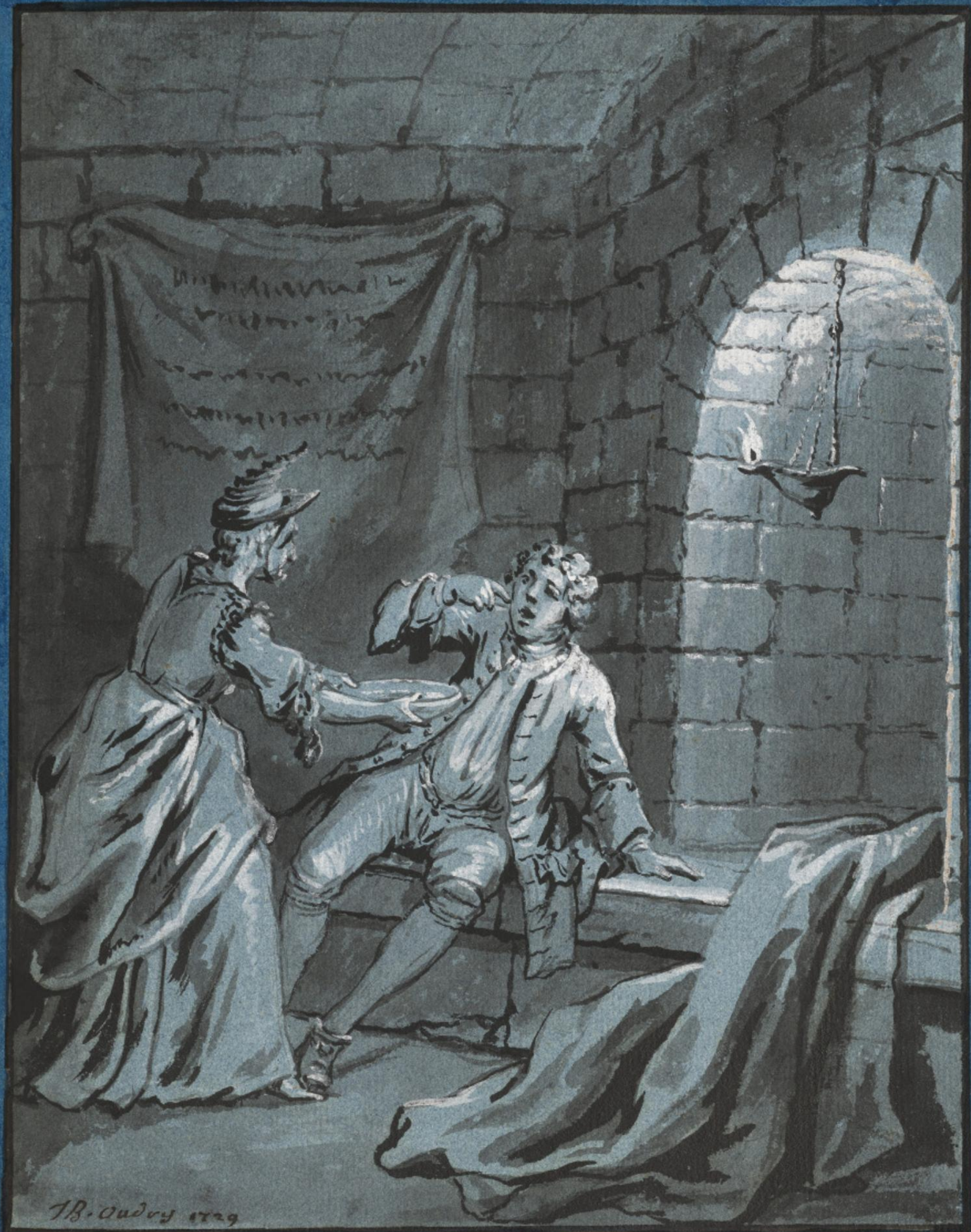














58. *La Goutte et l'Araignée*, first drawing, 1729



59. *La Goutte et l'Araignée*, second drawing, 1729



60. Le Loup et la cigogne, 1729



61. Le Lion abattu par l'homme, 1729







64. *Les Loups et les brebis*, first drawing, 1729



65. *Les Loups et les brebis*, second drawing, 1729





67. *Philomèle et Progné*, 1730

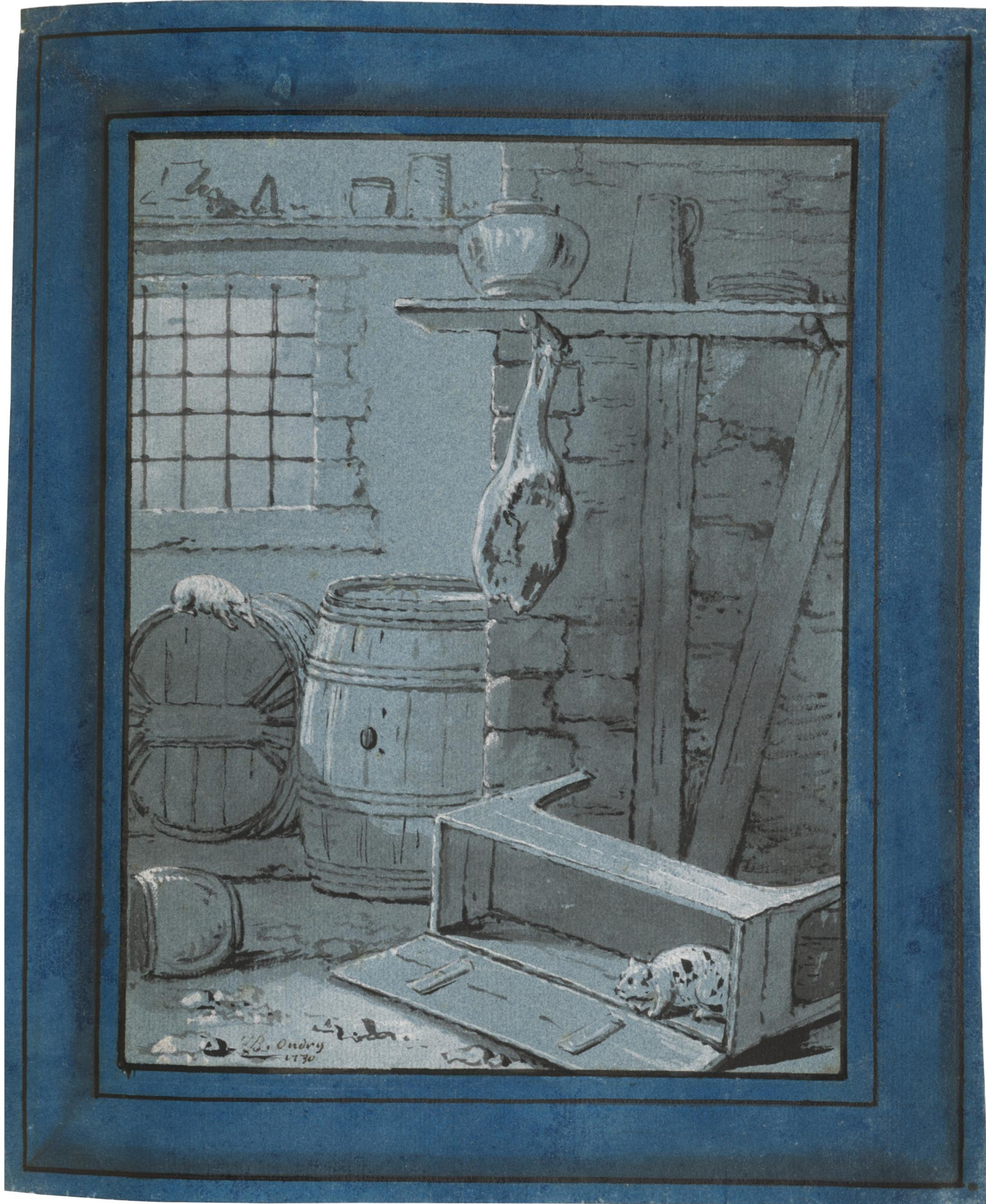




69. La Belette entrée dans un grenier, 1730



70. *Le Chat et un vieux rat*, first drawing, 1730



71. *Le Chat et un vieux rat*, second drawing, 1730

Book IV



72. *Le Lion amoureux*, first drawing, 1730



73. *Le Lion amoureux*, second drawing, 1730





75. La Mouche et la fourmi, 1730



76. *Le Jardinier et son seigneur*, first drawing, 1730



77. *Le Jardinier et son seigneur*, second drawing, 1730





79. Le Combat des rats et des belettes, 1730

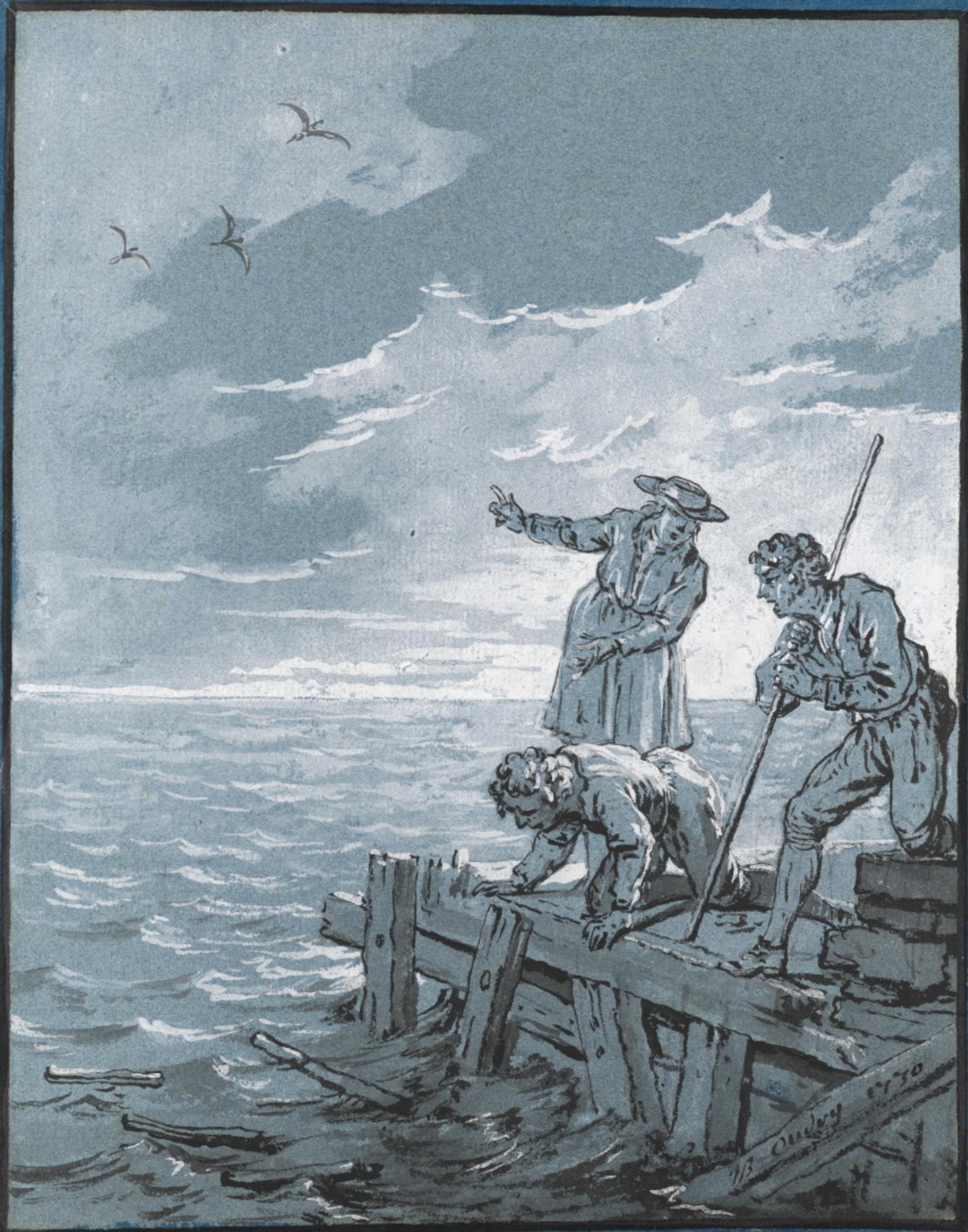




81. *L'Homme et l'idole de bois*, 1730



82. Le Geai paré des plumes du paon, 1730



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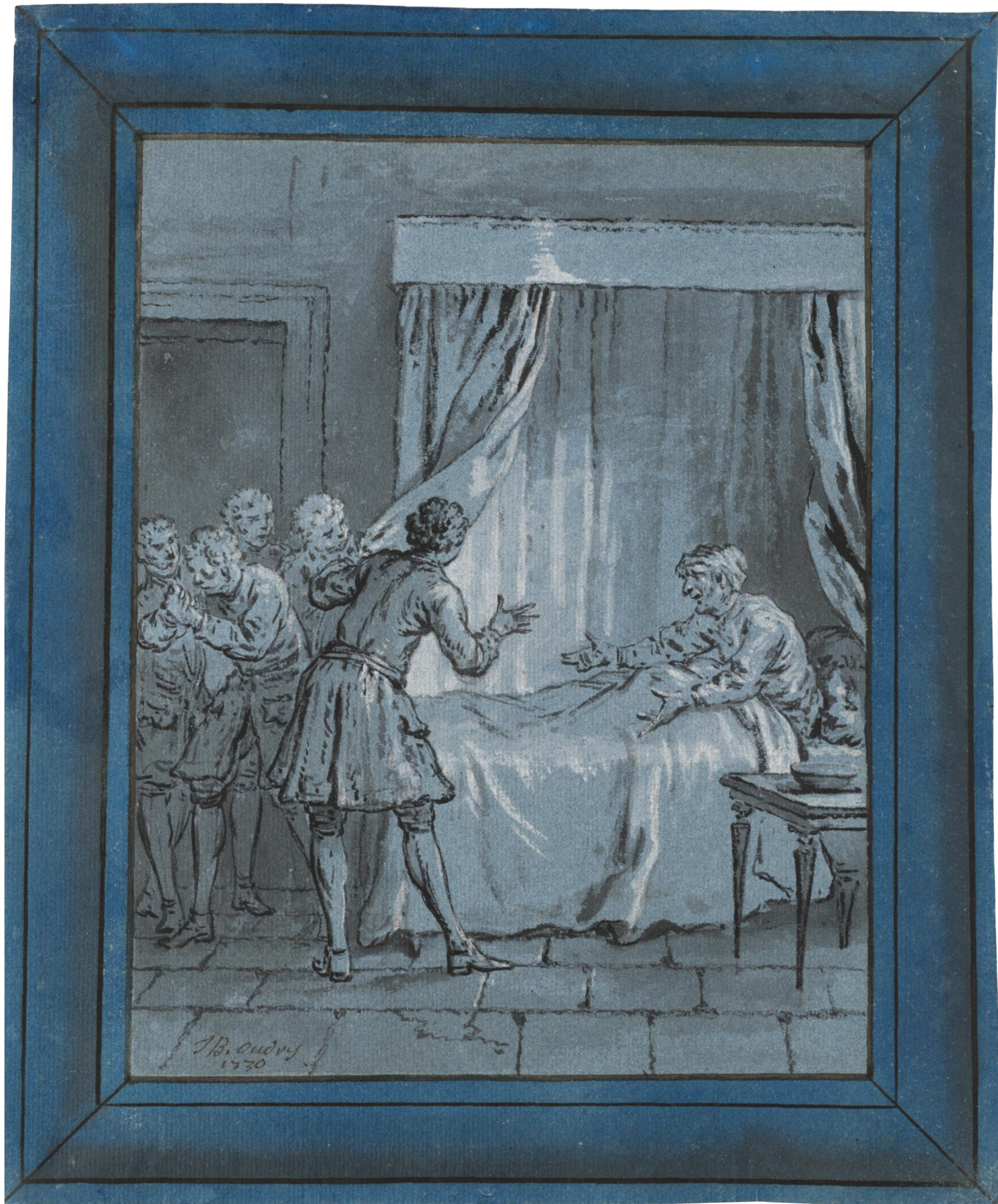
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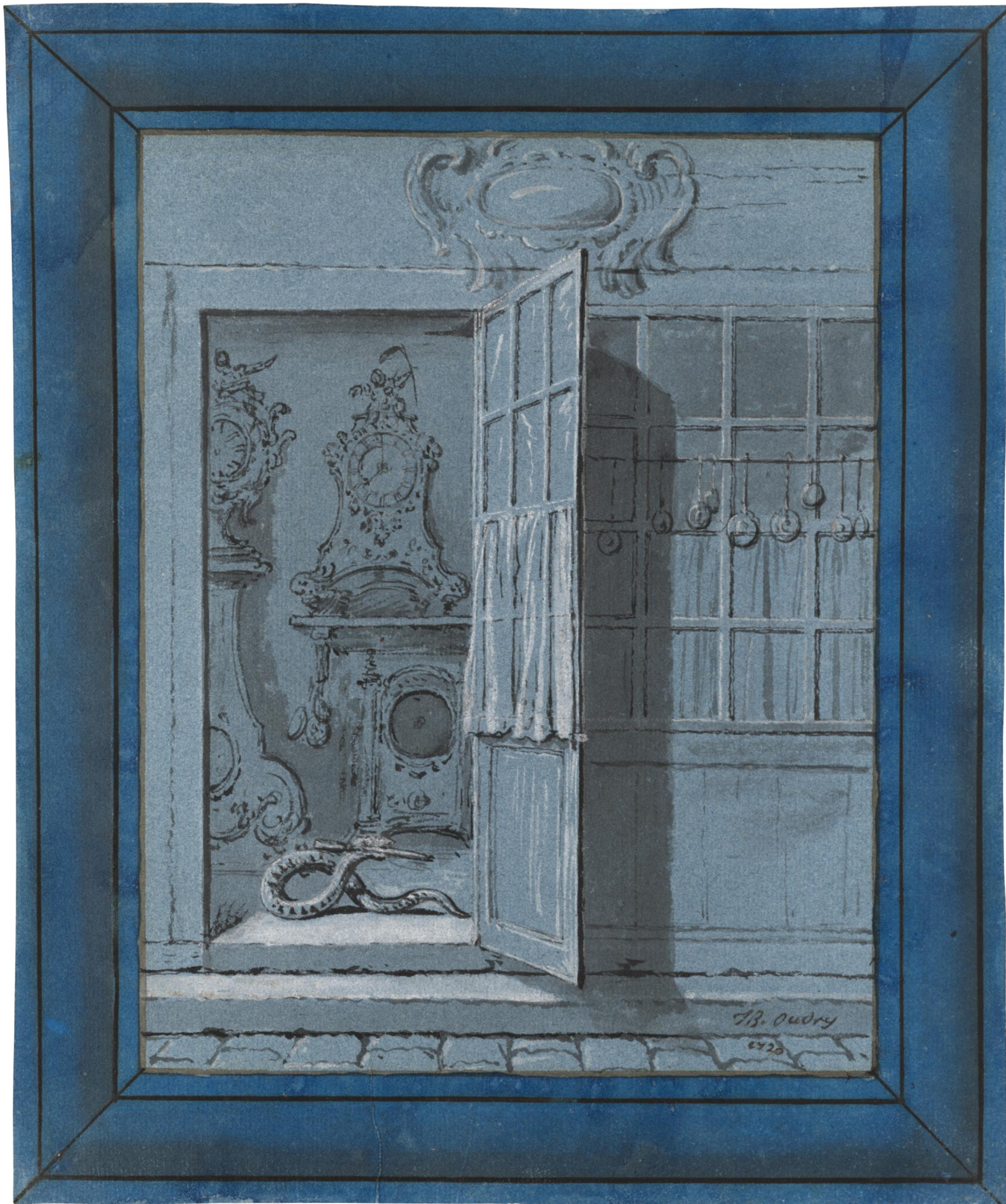


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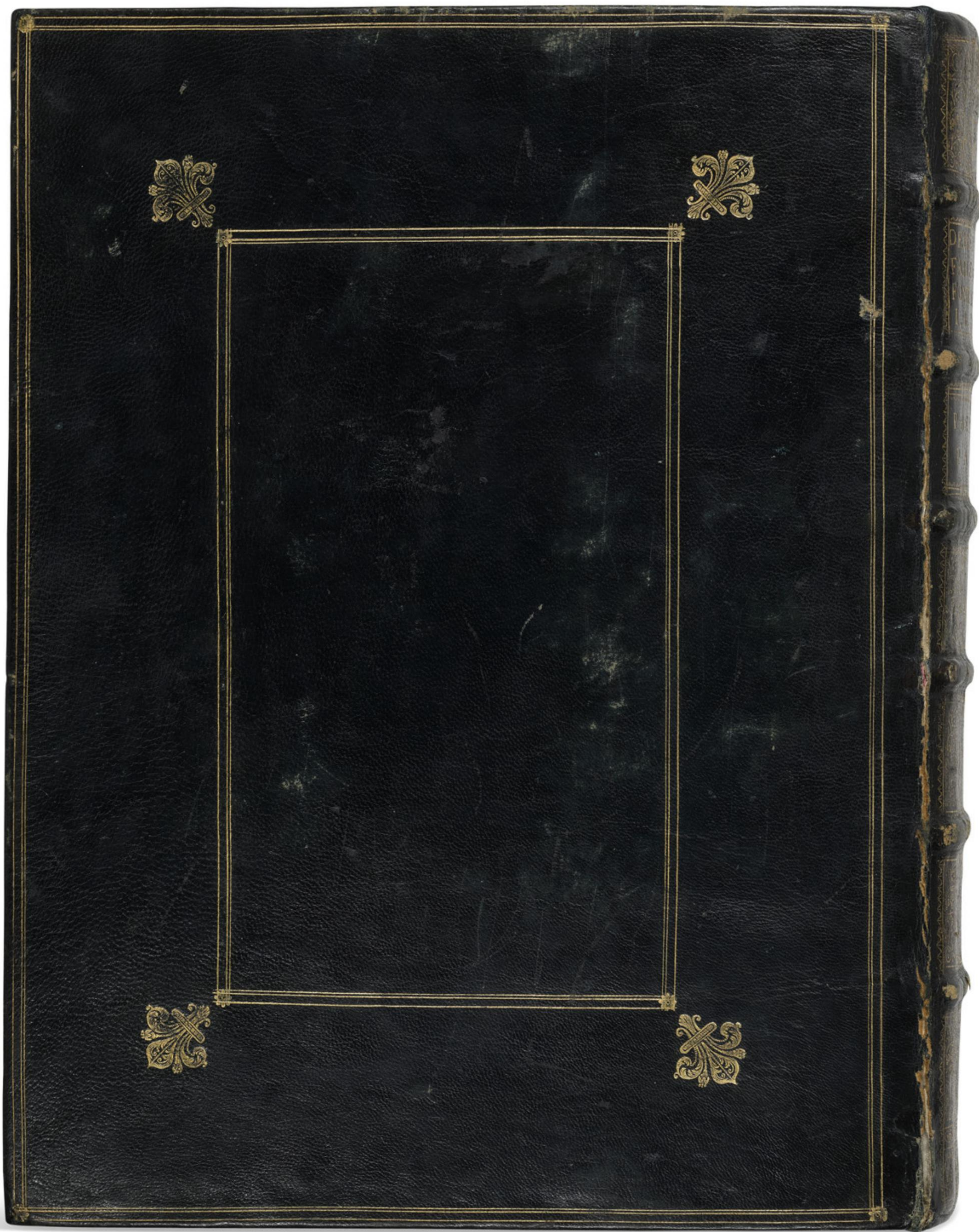
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